

SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT AND REPORTING DIVISION

ANALYSIS OF
SCHOOL JURISDICTION
1998-1999

ANNUAL EDUCATION
RESULTS REPORTS

MARCH 30, 2000

For further information, contact

System Improvement and Reporting Division
Devonian Building
11160 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 0L2

Telephone (780) 422-8671
Toll free in Alberta by dialing 310-0000
Fax: (780) 422-8345
Email: measurement.learning@gov.ab.ca

This document is also available on the Alberta Learning website
<http://ednet.edc.gov.ab.ca>

This document is intended primarily for:

Administrators
Stakeholders
Teachers

And may be of interest to:

Parents
Community members

Copyright © 2000, the Crown in Right of Alberta, as represented by the Minister of Learning.
Permission is given by the copyright owner to reproduce this document for educational purposes
and on a non-profit basis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Executive Summary
- 3 Issues, Trends and Circumstances
- 7 Progress and Accomplishments
- 8 Required Performance Measures
- 10 Areas for Improvement
- 12 Key Themes and Responses
- 14 Outstanding Questions and Follow-up Recommendation



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2017 with funding from
University of Alberta Libraries

<https://archive.org/details/analysisofschool1998albe>

INTRODUCTION

The completion of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR) by all school jurisdictions is a requirement of the Government of Alberta (Government Accountability Act) and Alberta Learning's School Authority Accountability Policy. AERRs highlight progress, accomplishments and results achieved in the past year in relationship to the jurisdiction's and Alberta Learning's three-year education plans.

Each school jurisdiction AERR was carefully read by the Education Planning and Results Team of the Regional Office and Native Education (RONE) Branch of Alberta Learning and a content analysis of each report was completed and documented in a summary and review format. The report is validated through multiple reviews by the analytical team.

School jurisdiction AERRs provide important information relevant to the local jurisdiction's context and hold implications for provincial decision making. This report provides primarily a qualitative analysis of the AERRs and identifies specific themes, insights and conclusions evident in the school jurisdiction documents. This report continues to place a heavier emphasis on what the school jurisdictions are saying in their AERRs as opposed to the compliance requirements of the accountability relationship with Alberta Learning.

The process used in developing this report included:

- Completion of a detailed content analysis of each school jurisdiction's AERR,
- Compilation of the content analysis information,
- Thematic analysis of the compiled data.

The information contained in this report was reviewed with the Executive Team (senior management) in Alberta Learning in early February 2000. Subsequent to the preliminary review of the report with the Executive Team, the report was given an in-depth, value-added analysis by the System Improvement and Reporting Division. This analysis identified several outstanding accountability issues summarized at the end of this report that require further dialogue with accountability stakeholders.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Education Results Reports (AERRs) provide an important accountability linkage between school boards and the Department of Learning. The analysis of school jurisdiction AERRs identifies key contextual factors jurisdictions are dealing with and the successes and challenges facing jurisdictions. The report also describes the degree of congruence between provincial reporting requirements and jurisdiction responsiveness to these requirements and identifies areas where additional work is required to make the accountability framework more meaningful and effective for Alberta Learning and jurisdictions. This reporting process provides meaningful data for government's three-year business planning process and provides a forum for sharing insights for improving accountability relationships with school jurisdictions.

The review of the 1998-1999 AERRs shows that fiscal pressures on school jurisdictions have lessened in comparison to 1997-1998, but are still an issue for a number of school boards, especially in the areas of meeting the special needs of students and in implementing and maintaining technology.

In 1998-1999 school jurisdictions reported a stronger emphasis on student, program and community issues in their AERRs. Related to the cost concerns associated with special education is the observation of increasing demand for special education services. Technology continues to be a good news – bad news story. Some jurisdictions are reporting successes with wireless networks and internet access as an important support for instruction, but cost pressures and professional development needs continue to challenge many jurisdictions.

Many School Boards reported considerable gains with community partnerships achieved in the area of coordinated services to children and with coordinated health services, but continue to see the need for extensive continued efforts in this area to meet complex and increasing needs.

Administrative issues dropped significantly from 1997-1998, but central office administrators are calling for more efficiency in the management of information requirements coordinated by Alberta Learning.

Overall, this analysis demonstrates that school jurisdictions have achieved an improved degree of planning and reporting sophistication with increased relevance for Alberta Learning's planning processes.

ISSUES, TRENDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

School Boards are asked to identify in their Annual Education Results Reports (AERRs) particular issues, trends or circumstances that hold implications for the operation of the jurisdiction. As with the 1997-98 AERRs these points were subsequently categorized as: 1) finance, 2) administrative, 3) community, 4) students, 5) program, 6) staff, or 7) facilities. The frequency of issues within analytical categories is summarized for 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 in Table 1. In 1998-1999, student, program and community issues rose to first, second and third place respectively, while finance issues dropped from first to fourth place. Staff issues rose in relative percentage, while administrative issues declined and facilities concerns demonstrated similar frequency percentages. Each category is analyzed in more detail below.

Table 1 – Issues, Trends and Circumstances

Category	Frequency 1997-1998	Percent	Frequency 1998-1999	Percent
Students	42	15	47	24
Program	31	11	40	21
Community	51	18	32	17
Finance	69	25	28	14
Staff	18	6	19	10
Administrative	53	19	17	9
Facilities	16	6	10	5
Total	280	100	193	100

STUDENT ISSUES

Forty-seven issues related to students. The greatest concerns – 51% (24) – were related to observations regarding increasing special needs students, including increasing ESL needs, student transiency, and aboriginal students with special needs. This observation appears related to last years number one concern in the student category over meeting the needs of students due to issues such as poverty, transiency, and cultural disadvantages.

Table 2 – Student Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Increasing special needs students	24	51
Student enrollment increasing	11	23
Student enrollment decreasing	5	11
Safe and Caring issues:		
• incidence of negative conduct	4	9
• positive outcomes noted	3	6
Total	47	100

PROGRAM ISSUES

Twenty-one percent (40) of the total issues or concerns were related to program delivery. Technology was the number one program issue in 1998-1999, with 14 jurisdictions expressing concern over challenges associated with maintaining technology infrastructure while three jurisdictions noted positive experiences with wireless networks and/or the positive impact of networks for students. Seven jurisdictions spoke of the emphasis they were putting on program choice for students, while four expressed concern regarding program fragmentation and the ability to meet student needs as a result of choice. Nine jurisdictions noted their efforts to place increased emphasis on improving student achievement. One jurisdiction argued for a junior high outreach program, another noted the challenges associated with providing programs in small, isolated schools, and another commented on the positive impact of special needs programs for students.

Table 3 – Program Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Technology Implementation	17	45
Program choice ±	11	26
Emphasis on student achievement	9	21
Other	3	8
Total	40	100

COMMUNITY ISSUES

Community issues were spread across a wider range than in 1997-1998. Support for school council collaboration was a strong theme present in both 1997-1998 and 1998-1999.

Table 4 – Community Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Support for school councils	7	22
Negative socio-economic factors limiting student achievement	7	22
Continue emphasis on coordinated services	6	19
Need for better public education/public relations	5	16
Diverse needs of a multi-cultural community	3	9
Vibrant local economy	2	6
- anticipated impact on lower retention rates	2	6
Total	32	100

Concern regarding negative socio-economic impacts was less, but still significant for seven jurisdictions while six jurisdictions noted the importance of continued emphasis on coordinated services for children. Other concerns centered on the potential for low unemployment to entice students to leave school early and the challenges of responding to the needs of multi-ethnic communities.

FINANCIAL ISSUES

The 28 finance issues included 13 calls for increases in general funding levels and nine specific funding issues focused on special needs students (5), class size (2), Early Childhood Services (1) or the unique needs of small schools (1). Additional concerns were expressed with limited fiscal flexibility (2) and with increasing school fees charged to parents (1). Three jurisdictions noted their pleasure with increased instructional spending in 1998-1999 or with a solid financial base. The financial issues are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 – Financial Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Overall funding pressures	13	46
Specific cost pressures	9	32
Miscellaneous	6	22
Total	28	100

STAFF ISSUES

There were 19 items addressed in this category. Again in 1998-1999 there were explicit commitments to professional growth (8). This was counterbalanced by seven jurisdictions noting concerns about staff wellness or turnover. Two jurisdictions called for greater professional development supports generally, while one noted the need for focused professional development on leadership development and administrator training. One Francophone jurisdiction noted difficulties in hiring math, science and French specialists.

Table 6 – Staff Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Emphasis on teacher evaluation and professional growth	8	42
Wellness/workload issues	7	37
PD supports	3	16
Staff availability	1	5
Total	19	100

ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

There were 17 administrative issues. This represents a marked decline in this category from last year. A major concern continues to exist with some large geographic jurisdictions and the impact of sparsity and distance on administrative functioning. Another issue regarding efficiency is evident in the call for less emphasis on management requirements and more emphasis on educational leadership. Two jurisdictions noted challenges with implementation of school based decision making.

Table 7 – Administrative Issues

Issue	Frequency	Percent
Large geographic district	9	53
Management vs. leadership emphasis	5	29
SBDM implementation	2	12
New student information system being implemented	1	6
Total	17	100

FACILITIES ISSUES

There were again relatively few issues noted in the AERRs regarding facilities, although concerns regarding increasing enrollments noted under students hold direct implications for facilities needs. Mirroring this need, the primary facilities issue noted by eight jurisdictions is with overcrowded schools in specific locations. One jurisdiction stated its concern with aging facilities and one celebrated the completion of a new facility.

CONCLUSIONS

Fiscal matters declined substantially in 1998-1999 as an issue or concern expressed by school jurisdictions in their AERRs. However, a number of school boards are continuing to feel fiscal pressures, and specific need areas such as special education are exerting pressures on board instructional costs.

Several major themes leap out of the content analysis of school jurisdiction issues and trends. Tangible concerns are present regarding the ability of school jurisdictions to meet the wide range of special needs students are presenting. Technology implementation is another major area of concern. Efficiencies in the administrative requirements placed on central office staff should be considered by Alberta Learning. Also, concerns over staff wellness appear to be a growing phenomenon in AERR documents.

The fact that students, program and community issues are predominant in the 1998-1999 AERR's suggests that the accountability framework may be reflecting a more appropriate focus on these areas now that the basic supports are more available to school jurisdictions. The overall pattern of issues suggest that some additional fine tuning of the education supports is needed, but that growth and improvement is apparent in the basic education system.

PROGRESS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The provincial government identified five priority areas in 1997-1998 and added some key initiatives regarding early literacy, English as a second language and special education in 1998-1999. The patterns of the School Boards in reporting progress and accomplishments regarding these priorities and initiatives for 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 are noted in Table 8.

Table 8 – Provincial Priorities (n = 60)

Priority Area	Percent Reported		Typical Key Accomplishments – 1998-99
	1997-98	1998-99	
Coordination of Services	75%	75%	Most jurisdictions reported significant progress in working with regional health authorities. Some indicated progress in the area of counseling.
High School Completion	78%	57%	Jurisdiction reported progress in off campus education programs, virtual schooling and the development of transition programs.
Secondary Math	73%	58%	Jurisdictions have made considerable progress in professional development for teachers, reviewing diploma and achievement results and providing overall leadership in programming.
Access to Technology	78%	75%	Most jurisdictions have made progress in developing professional development activities for teachers, Wide Area Networks, developing technology plans and creating on-line education opportunities.
Public Satisfaction	N/A	62%	Jurisdictions reported such initiatives as developing media relations plans, more school council involvement, planning workshops for stakeholders and more public participation in school events.
Disadvantaged (ELI)	N/A	68%	Jurisdictions reported significant progress in the number of students receiving programming in this area.
English as a Second Language	N/A	48%	Some jurisdictions reported progress in this area.
Special Education	N/A	57%	Jurisdictions reported improvements in programming for gifted students, students with behavior difficulties, developing special needs inservicing and handbooks as well as developing Individualized program templates.
Board Identified Priority	58%	28%	Boards identified priorities included student achievement, early childhood development staff wellness, profession development, summer programs, achievement analysis, Fine Arts programs, transportation and maintenance.

CONCLUSIONS

Most Boards are reporting on provincial priorities in their AERRs, often in relationship to the goals in their education plans, rather than in a separate “progress and accomplishments” section. Revisions to the March 2000 *Guide for School Board Planning and Results Reporting* support this reporting relationship between provincial priorities and goals.

The elimination in 1998-1999 of a required measure on high school completion likely caused the reduction in reporting on this priority area from 1997-1998. Also of concern is the lessened focus on reporting on general progress and accomplishments regarding secondary Math, a key priority area.

The challenge of inter-relating the provincial and local school board priorities also requires further attention. Boards often face local priorities and challenges that are highly compelling for the trustees and senior management. Some jurisdictions have suggested clearer background information or rationale for provincial priorities. Alberta Learning is committed to increased dialogue with jurisdictions around local and provincial priorities.

REQUIRED PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The AERRs were reviewed to determine if the required provincial measures were reported; this information is summarized for 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 in Table 9. Table 9 also indicates if the school jurisdiction included an overall assessment of how well it met its goal expectations as outlined in its Three-Year Plan.

School jurisdiction targets for the provincial achievement tests and diploma exams continue to be primarily the provincial standards for acceptable achievement (85% of students) and excellent achievement (15% of students). Because most jurisdictions have adopted the provincial standards as their achievement targets, any analytical reports on student achievement completed by the Student Evaluation Branch will have high relevance for school jurisdictions, but the benefits of target setting for critical reflection may be minimized with this approach.

CONCLUSIONS

The level of compliance of Boards when reporting required provincial measures is relatively consistent from 1997-1998 to 1998-1999, however, some problem areas are apparent in the 1998-1999 AERRs. The problematic measures include: cohort achievement test data, targets for achievement tests and diploma exams, special needs measures, and assessment of progress and achievement for all goals.

With the exception of provincial achievement tests, diploma exams and participation rates, the measures requirements for 1999-2000 will provide more flexibility to school jurisdictions in choosing the performance measures that best reflect the local context and that meet school jurisdiction analytical needs. Whether this additional flexibility provides for more meaningful results reporting at the local level and for provincial analysis should remain a topic for discussion and review as the accountability framework continues to evolve.

Table 9 – Inclusion of Required Performance Measures in AERRs (n = 60)

Results Measure	Percent 1997-1998	Percent 1998-1999
1. Percentage of students who achieved acceptable standard/standard of excellence on provincial achievement tests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Based on those writing (4 years of data) Based on cohort (4 years of data). 	93% N/A	90% 58%
2. Percentage of students who achieve acceptable standard/standard of excellence on diploma exams.	97%	88%
3. Percentage of students who achieved jurisdiction targets on provincial achievement tests and diploma exams (explicitly stated).	N/A	67%
4. Participation rates: percentage of students in grades 3, 6 and 9 who wrote provincial achievement tests and student participation in diploma courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement tests Diploma Exams. 	85% 93%	98% 92%
5. Percentage of parents satisfied with quality of education.	97%	95%
6. Percentage of students satisfied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> overall variety in classroom and school activities challenge in classroom and school activities. 	92% (Combined 92%)	93% 92% 87%
7. Goal 2 - % of parents satisfied with their opportunities for involvement in decisions affecting education in their child's school.	95%	92%
8. Goal 3 - % of parents of students with special needs satisfied with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to services for child with special needs Progress and achievement of their child with special needs. 	(local measure 90%)	72% 55%
9. Goal 4 – Required local measure(s).	93%	88%
10. Goal 5 – Percentage of students satisfied they have the skills to use information technology.	60-65%	88%
11. Goal 7 – Percentage of parents satisfied with access to and the quality of school information about their children's progress and achievement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Percent jurisdiction spending on instruction Percent jurisdiction spending on administration Spending per student per school year 	95% (combined 93%) 87%	98% 92% 88% 83%
12. Local measures for provincial goals identified 1997-1998 plan? Local measures reported on?	42%	75%
13. Overall assessment and achievement reported.	Yes -77% Partial – 18%	Yes – 42% Partial – 43%

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

School jurisdiction AERRs were analyzed to determine what areas held the highest priority for future attention. In 1997-1998, forty-eight areas for improvement were identified in the AERRs. This year 188 areas were identified. Forty-three AERRs identified areas for improvement, which are summarized in Table 10 and discussed further below.

Table 10 - Areas for Improvement (n = 43)

Area	n	PERCENTAGE	RANKING
Student achievement, satisfaction levels, completion rates and career counseling	69	37	1
Curricular programs and technology implementation	41	22	2
Public and parent satisfaction, improved coordination of services and community linkages	32	17	3
Staff professional development and wellness	19	11	4
Lobby for funding increases, smaller class sizes and review parent fund raising/fee levels	11	6	5
Facility modernization needs and new schools to meet student enrollment increases	8	4	6
Balance central office-school leadership functions; rationalize reporting requirements	6	3	7
Total	186	100	

STUDENTS

School jurisdictions are placing a strong emphasis on student needs in the 1998-1999 AERRs. Twenty-two jurisdictions emphasized improving student achievement results on provincial achievement tests or diploma exams. Four jurisdictions spoke to the need to improve participation rates on provincial tests. Eighteen focused on the need to improve secondary Math results or overall junior high achievement. Eight jurisdictions noted the need to improve the safe and caring nature of their schools. Seven jurisdictions spoke of the need to improve student satisfaction. Six jurisdictions mentioned improving high school completion rates and four noted improving career counseling available to students.

PROGRAM

Improvements in technology implementation is a major program objective noted in 19 AERRs. Facilitating program choice is a priority for nine jurisdictions. Better strategies for meeting the special needs of students was noted by six jurisdictions, while continuing a strong emphasis on early literacy or ESL was mentioned by five jurisdictions. Two jurisdictions stated the need for improved curriculum implementation supports.

COMMUNITY

Thirty-two community related areas for improvement were identified, with most (18) focusing on improving public and parent satisfaction or communications. Fourteen jurisdictions spoke of continuing a strong emphasis on improving coordinated delivery of services.

STAFF

Twelve jurisdictions spoke of increasing an emphasis on staff professional development with particular areas of need including technology skills and leadership development. Seven jurisdictions noted a priority of promoting staff wellness and morale, or improving staff mediation skills or discipline practices.

FUNDING

Eleven jurisdictions noted their intention of focusing on funding issues and lobbying for an increase on general program funding (7), or for smaller class sizes (2), or for a review of parent fund raising and fee levels (2).

FACILITIES

Six jurisdictions noted the need for school modernization, or new schools to meet increasing enrollments (2).

ADMINISTRATION

Areas for improvement for administration included balancing division and school leadership functions (4), or rationalizing reporting required by the province (2).

CONCLUSIONS

The increase from 48 areas of improvement identified in the 1997-1998 AERR's to 186 areas for improvement in 1998-1999 AERR's, demonstrates an increased efficacy of results reporting in identifying areas of need. The overall pattern of needs mirrors the issues and concerns identified by school jurisdictions. The focus on students, program and community issues holds important implications for future Ministry decisions regarding how best to support school boards in meeting student needs and in where to focus future accountability relationships with school jurisdictions.

KEY THEMES AND RESPONSES

This report notes a number of key themes and issues evident in the school boards' documents. These themes are related to actions taken or under consideration by Alberta Learning.

Key Theme	Response
1. Many jurisdictions are reporting increasing challenges in meeting the special needs of students. These increasing challenges hold implications for the structure and articulation of supports available to school jurisdictions in meeting the special needs of students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Learning and stakeholder groups will be reviewing special education issues and identifying solutions to best meet the needs of students. Implications of this review will be carefully considered in relationship to existing policy, program and funding structures.
2. Technology implementation continues to be both a success and a challenge for school jurisdictions, suggesting a need to continue the supports available to school jurisdictions for implementing technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment has been made to continue technology integration funding for an additional three years. • Alberta Learning's School Technology Task Group (STTG) is continuing its work to provide overall direction and coordination for provincial technology initiatives.
3. Although less often identified as an issue in 1998-1999, at least 20% of jurisdictions pointed to the need to continue the emphasis on coordinated delivery of services to children and on early childhood development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Edmonton Public School Board will pilot a class size reduction program, and along with Alberta Learning will look at the impact of teaching techniques and strategies that maximize student learning. • AISI funding will provide school jurisdictions with additional opportunities to target early childhood development if this is a local priority. • Twenty-six million dollars from the Alberta Student Health Initiative will benefit up to 73,000 students in 2000-2001.

Key Theme	Response
<p>4. The percent of jurisdictions reporting fiscal pressures have declined from 55% in 1997-1998 to 35% in 1998-1999. A significant number of jurisdictions (21) continue to seek adjustments to their funding supports.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A three-member MLA review committee is looking into financial issues faced by school jurisdictions with high growth and density to see what can be done to make the funding model more flexible in adapting to changing local needs. Some of the areas the review team will examine will include school boards experiencing rapid enrolment growth, as well as those situated in densely populated areas where socio-economic factors may influence program costs. • All operating grants will increase three per cent for each school year during the next three years.
<p>5. School jurisdictions are recognizing the importance of professional growth and development, especially in relationship to technology and curriculum implementation. Continued support by Alberta Learning for professional development helps to reinforce this priority area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta's six regional consortia will benefit from \$900,000 in ongoing support from Alberta Learning. • Supported through a \$200,000 fund from Alberta Learning, the Galileo Network is working with a number of schools throughout the province to provide intensive classroom and school-based support for various technology initiatives.
<p>6. An emerging theme in school jurisdiction plans and reports focuses on the issue of staff wellness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School boards have the primary responsibility for responding to this theme. Alberta Learning is sensitive to the key role teachers play in the basic learning system and will monitor this issue.
<p>7. Almost 20% of school jurisdictions are reporting facility pressures associated with enrollment growth or aging infrastructure. Hence, the school facilities task force report continues to be a key priority for these jurisdictions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Learning will continue to work closely together in implementing recommendations from the task force report.

Key Theme	Response
8. Some central office administrators have identified the need to improve the efficiency of the various reporting requirements placed on school jurisdictions in relationship to the accountability framework.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The System Improvement and Reporting Division of Alberta Learning will review the reporting requirements relating to accountability and program evaluation with the view to improving efficiency and quality of data collection. • Management Information Reporting Schedules (MIRS) have been reduced from 7 to 3 for 1999-2000.

OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS AND FOLLOW-UP RECOMMENDATIONS

This report raises several questions that warrant follow-up action by Alberta Learning in consultation with school jurisdictions, with the intent of improving the accountability framework for basic learning. These questions and the recommended follow-up action are summarized below.

1. Should the accountability framework maintain a core set of required measures beyond achievement tests, diploma exam results and participation rates; to provide for comparability of measures between jurisdictions?
2. Is the balance between compliance and collaboration about right? For example, do provincial priorities sufficiently reflect jurisdictions' priorities and vice versa?
3. Do provincial standards for achievement on Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Exams provide useful targets for student achievement reported at the jurisdiction level?

Given these outstanding questions regarding accountability, the Basic Learning Division, with support from System Improvement and Reporting Division, should begin a dialogue with superintendents and trustees regarding these questions. Based on this dialogue, Basic Learning and System Improvement and Reporting should consider changes to the *2001 Guide to School Board Planning and Reporting*.

National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada



3 3286 52203355 0